



Telecommunications Interdependencies

Issue Background

The Nation's ability to fulfill its national security missions depends on secure and reliable infrastructures. Interruptions or manipulations of vital services—telecommunications, energy, transportation, banking and finance—would be detrimental to the welfare of the United States. During the mid-1990s, the President acknowledged these interdependencies and encouraged the private sector to actively participate in the protection of critical infrastructures from both physical and cyber attacks. The President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) recognizes that uninterrupted or minimally disrupted telecommunications services are indispensable to sustain other infrastructures' operational capabilities and is committed to continue supporting public-private partnerships, as well as information sharing efforts, with other sectors.

History of NSTAC Actions

The NSTAC has fostered cooperation and information sharing initiatives across critical infrastructures, including the electrical power, transportation, and financial services industries throughout its 21-year history. The NSTAC first examined infrastructure interdependencies in 1986 when its Telecommunications Systems Survivability (TSS) Task Force initially reviewed the vulnerability of telecommunications to the loss of commercial electric power. Following up on the TSS Task Force's recommendations and a Presidential request, an Energy Task Force was formed to conduct a joint study with the electric power industry to examine the interdependencies between electric power and telecommunications after an earthquake. The task force recommended the establishment of a program to assign priority electric power restoration to critical national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) telecommunications facilities. The task force later advised the National Communications System (NCS) and Department of Energy on the development of the Telecommunications Electric Service Priority program which is operated by the NCS' Office of Priority Telecommunications.

In 1995, the NSTAC Information Assurance Task Force (renamed the Information Infrastructure Group) began conducting a series of risk assessments on the electric power, financial services, and transportation industries' dependence on information technology and associated information assurance risks. Working with each respective industry, the task force made recommendations to the President that emphasized the importance of industry/Government cooperation and information sharing.

Recent NSTAC Activities

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks demonstrated the magnitude of the financial sector's dependence on the telecommunications infrastructure. In 2003, the Financial Services Task Force was established to: 1) examine vulnerabilities related to infrastructure interdependencies between the telecommunications and financial services industries, and 2) analyze issues from an NS/EP perspective regarding network redundancy and diversity (focusing on resilience instead of reliability) that could impact the financial services sector and, consequently, the U.S. economy and the welfare of the Nation. Task force recommendations to the President will focus on a process for mitigating risks to the financial sector and NS/EP missions.